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**Statewide News Release**

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**Note to editors:** A photo of CHFS Deputy Secretary Judge Timothy Feeley speaking at the System of Care Academy is attached.

**Conference focuses on easing racial disparity in  
juvenile justice and child welfare**

*Lexington summit includes providers, educators, families*

**FRANKFORT, Ky.** (June 10, 2016) – Easing racial disparities across the system of care in the state's juvenile justice and child welfare program was the focus of a conference cosponsored by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) this week.

The theme of System of Care Academy, this past week at Lexington's Marriott Griffin Gate, was "Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact and Health Disparities across the System of Care."

More than 500 registrants attended, and most were from the public sector, representing all child-serving agencies – behavioral health case managers, clinicians and peer support specialists, court designated workers, juvenile justice staff, educators (administrators and teachers), public health department staff, family resource and youth services center directors and staff. Youth and family members also attended.

CHFS Deputy Secretary Judge Timothy Feeley said that minority youth are over-represented in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

"Minority youth are also under-represented in the specialty behavioral healthcare system, which contributes to disparate outcomes," he said. "This year's academy was focused on building capacity across child-serving agencies to reduce disproportionate minority contact and to engage better outreach strategies in areas where these youth are under-represented."

The conference was sponsored by The Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID), part of CHFS, the Juvenile Justice Advisory Board's Subcommittee on Equity and Justice for All Youth and Eastern Kentucky University.

This was the third annual conference. Judge Feeley said when planning began months ago, academy organizers saw an opportunity for collaborating with partner agencies to make addressing racial disparity a priority this year.

“This academy brings together juvenile justice and child welfare experts from across the state and from every professional discipline,” he said. “They are all focused on sharing their own successful strategies. We want them to return to their communities feeling like they have the tools or knowledge to impact change.”

LaDonna Koebel, acting commissioner for the Department of Juvenile Justice, applauded the collaborative efforts to address racial disparities.

“Equal access to treatment services and mental health care helps ensure that all youth have a strong support system as they transition back into their communities,” Koebel said. “This leads to better outcomes for children and families and decreases the likelihood that a youth will return to the juvenile justice system.”

Rachel Bingham, Executive Officer in the Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts and Chairwoman of the State Interagency Council, which oversees coordinated policy development, comprehensive planning, and collaborative budgeting for services to children with emotional disabilities, said it’s important to address disproportionate minority contact across the state’s juvenile system of care.

“I commend the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and the many councils, boards and state agencies who are looking at how Kentucky can address racial disparities in its juvenile justice and welfare systems,” Bingham said. “It’s important to take an individual approach to the needs of our families and children. A cookie-cutter approach isn’t effective. If we want kids to be successful, we need to understand their stories and their lives.”

Judge Feeley said through collaborations at the academy, juvenile justice and child welfare leaders can develop a plan for next steps to reduce disparity.

“Fairness is fundamental,” Judge Feeley said. “With a multidisciplinary team like this, we can ensure that minority youth coming into care are treated equally and that our corrective plans are effective.”

The conference also featured speakers Hasan Davis and Pastor Edward L. Palmer Sr.

Davis is a nationally known juvenile justice advocate and author whose deep beliefs in the impact of committed adults on a child’s success are based on his own early experience as a youth in the system. Palmer is chairman of the Kentucky Subcommittee on Equity and Justice for All Youth (SEJAY) and is a member of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Board (JJAB), where he works to eliminate disproportionate minority contact within the juvenile justice system.

Other sessions focused on evidence-based prevention and treatment of adolescent substance use, working effectively with youth involved with child welfare and juvenile justice; addressing the behavioral health needs of youth who are deaf and hard of hearing; the role of prevention in reducing health disparities, effective approaches for working with transition-age youth and strategies for creating a youth- and family-driven system of care.

Look for pictures of the event on the CHFS Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/kychfs/>.

Learn more about DBHDID at <http://dbhdid.ky.gov/kdbhdid/>.

*Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.*